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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

DEPT FOR EUR/CE ASCHEIBE AND MGLANTZ

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Romania: 11/22 Presidential Election: As Expected,
Basescu and Geoana to Face Off

¶1. (SBU) Summary. With approximately 75 percent of ballots counted from the November 22 presidential election, incumbent Traian Basescu (32.8 percent) and Social Democrat (PSD) Mircea Geoana (29.8 percent) seem certain as expected to advance to the December 6 presidential runoff. Third place finisher Crin Antonescu of the National Liberal party (PNL) (20.4 percent) claimed pollsters tampered with exit poll data. Preliminary returns for the non-binding referendum on a unicameral parliament showed 77 percent in favor. Turnout for the election and referendum was over 50 percent. The battle will now focus on wooing the PNL electorate, ethnic Hungarian voters, and the far Right. End Summary.

EARLY RESULTS

¶2. (SBU) The Central Election Bureau (BEC) released results early on November 23 based on 74 percent of precincts reporting: Basescu 32.8 percent, Geoana 29.8 percent, Antonescu 20.4, Vadim Tudor (Greater Romania Party - PRM) 5.4, Kelemen Hunor (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania - UDMR) 4.4, Sorin Oprescu (independent) 3.3, Gigi Becali (New Generation Party - PNG) 1.8, and five other independent candidates with less than one percent each. Voter turnout thus far was 53.8 percent. As no candidate received 50 percent of eligible voters, the top two finishers - almost certainly Basescu and Geoana - will advance to the December 6 runoff.

REACTIONS

¶3. (SBU) Basescu thanked both his supporters and those who did not vote for him, saying "To the latter, I got their message." Geoana thanked his supporters and those who voted for Antonescu, "who ran a beautiful campaign." Antonescu claimed pollsters manipulated the data and that a major media conglomerate published on its website the news that Basescu and Geoana made the runoff two hours before polls closed.

THE REFERENDUM

¶4. (SBU) Voters also were asked to cast a separate ballot for a non-binding referendum to abolish the Senate and reduce the number of mps from 471 to 300. BEC's results, based on less than half of total returns, show 77.4 percent approving a unicameral Parliament, with 88.9 percent of ballots approving a reduction in the number of mps. With just over 50 percent turnout, the referendum has passed. President Basescu, who pushed referendum to tap into voter discontent with politicians, welcomed the outcome and called on Parliament to act on the will of the people.

SCATTERED PROBLEMS

¶5. (SBU) The national police reported on election night that it had recorded 945 electoral complaints throughout the country, 51 of which made criminal allegations. Many of these violations involved attempted vote buying, whether with cash, food or blankets. The police spokesman noted that there were fewer complaints than during the June 2009 European Parliamentary elections, when voter turnout

was lower.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. The first-round results were no surprise. Basescu and Geoana relied on large party machines and performed better in the countryside than Antonescu, who appeals more to the urban electorate. Of note were the poor performances of Bucharest Mayor Sorin Oprescu - whose candidacy many pundits heralded as a "game-changer" - and the UDMR's Kelemen, who received only two thirds of the votes expected. Antonescu will be hard-pressed to prove his charges of manipulation. Whatever shenanigans occurred were probably minor and committed by all three major parties, and therefore unlikely to affect the outcome. The real battle now begins as Basescu and Geoana, neck-and-neck, spend the next two weeks aggressively courting the 38 percent of voters up for grabs.

GITENSTEIN